

WHAT IS TRUTH?

PULSE OF SPIRIT
NOVEMBER 25, 2020



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I have a profound topic to tackle today—truth. People are so confused—they are asking what’s going on in their world, and many have the most confusing basis for understanding it. There’s such distrust. And if you distrust the world around you and the people in it, it becomes difficult to come to know the truth. You’re suspicious of everything you hear. And people today often don’t even believe their own eyes when it comes to what they see. Distrust in oneself makes it hard to know what is true.

If you will, I invite you to join me on what will begin as a thought journey to explore *What is truth?* And then perhaps it will become a journey of the heart and a journey of the spirit, and ultimately a journey of awareness and knowing.

This is from the United States Declaration of Independence.

We hold these truths to be self-evident....

The founders of America had a vision of truth coming out of the period of Enlightenment. Our two greatest presidents are known for truth. Abraham Lincoln is known as “Honest Abe.” And American children, at least of my generation, were told the mythical story of George Washington and the cherry tree. As a boy, George chopped down the tree, and when his father discovered what he had done, he confronted George. George replied, “I cannot tell a lie...I did cut it down with my hatchet.”

This story addresses something very basic about truth, which we teach our children: *Be honest*. At this level, truth is about the facts. It’s about being an honorable witness to fact and an honorable reporter of fact.

I remember distinctly in my own life when I came to the point of realizing that I was compromising myself if I did not tell the truth to another person. I had all these reasons in my head, as many people do, why it would be easier to tell a white lie. And I realized that the world

around me was convincing me that it was more efficacious to tell a lie than to tell the truth. And yet, I was compromising myself by doing so, and I realized it was just better for me and better for my world to tell the truth.

Many people haven't discovered that. And even in the public square, we have people who don't tell the truth—going past even just bending it a little bit to telling whoppers!

The Soviet Union came up with a propaganda technique that others have adopted. It's called the *firehose of falsehood*. The theory behind this is that if you spray out all kinds of disparate facts that are mostly untrue, the public will become disoriented. They will lose their ability to discern what is true and what is not true. You will then be able to persuade a large segment of the population, through propaganda, of whatever it is that you want them to believe. Currently, in America, there is a dizzying fusillade of untruths.

So this is the most basic level of truth: *truthful reporting of fact*.

At the next level of truth, there are fact patterns. In my professional career, I learned that the first things I heard about a subject were usually inconsistent and usually not true. The fact pattern was erratic. So I learned not to trust the information that came to me when it was all over the place. A given report might be true, and it might not be true. I learned that through an interest in the truth of what was happening, and through researching the facts, I could get to a point where there was a consistent flow of facts

that formed a reliable pattern. It painted a picture. And so, I found I had a way of operating in that circumstance, based on a supposition of what was happening, that I could test at every step as I went along.

I believe that's useful in all kinds of situations. If you're getting to know somebody, you hear this from them, you hear that, and there is the joy of knowing you don't know them well yet. The more you get to know them, the more your experience paints a picture and you begin to see who the person is.

Gossip often contains erratic fact patterns. Do you trust what you hear through gossip? One person says something. Somebody else has a different view—they say exactly the opposite. What's *really* true?

This brings us to another level of truth. It's the difference between firsthand observation and thirdhand report. The Age of Enlightenment gave us principles of modern science, where you have science looking at the data and creating theories about the fact pattern. Perhaps after testing, they then take those theories and represent them to us as truth. Yet, this kind of "truth" can change based on a new scientific approach.

Today the "truths" of modern science are held in some suspicion. Scientific truth has let us down because they don't bring us ultimate enlightenment or ultimate empowerment, even in the natural world. And science generally doesn't account for how the science is used.

Quantum physics is taking us to science beyond third-person observation, turning the ideas of the science of enlightenment upside-down. And yet, who of us is willing to throw out all the developments of modern science? Who of us is ready to throw out modern medicine and to say that if they become ill, they won't rely on the medical profession to assist? And still, even we would probably acknowledge that there is a lot more to our health than modern science can provide for us.

One of the unfortunate impacts of the teaching of science as it is is that the young person is sometimes taught not to trust their own eyes—their own first-person observation. They are trained to trust what they read in the book, what modern science says, and all the theories and postulations of science. In the process, a person can lose track of the natural world they see with their own eyes.

The scientific methods applied to the natural world have been turned into a study of us—human beings. So we have sociology, anthropology, psychology and more. So now science is telling us how we are made inside, as if it knows more authoritatively who we are and how we are made than we do ourselves!

Otto Scharmer, the author of *Theory U*, speaks of the difference between a firsthand observation and the third-person observation of the natural and social sciences. He speaks about it this way. He says we can focus on the thing that results from the creative process—and he uses the metaphor of a painting, so we can focus on the

painting. We can focus on the process of painting, or we can observe the artist as she stands in front of a blank canvas. Here we begin to move into another range of knowing truth, without which we are lost as human beings. Because we cannot live our lives as if we were a scientist, studying us, telling us how to live. What would we do? Every step along the way, have a little handbook on what they found out about us as human beings, and then follow the handbook? Impossible! That's not how we live. We don't live from the outside in. We live from the inside out.

We are the artist painting the painting. If we wanted to truly know what that is like, I would want to talk to the artist and have them tell us what it was like for them to paint the painting. Or I would *be* the artist and explore what it was like to paint the painting. What was I coming to know as the artist? There is truth that we come to know that way. It's not the truth of external observation. It's the truth of being in the place of conscious creation and being in touch with the flow of conscious creation through oneself.

Otto Scharmer goes on to apply this metaphor of the artist to a leader. Fair enough, but who of us is exempt from the analogy? We can hear someone else's stories of truth, or teachings of truth, at whatever level. We can listen to principles of truth. And however accurate they are, until they are known from the inside out, they are not the truth that we fully know. We might know it as a principle or as an idea, or as a teaching. But to know higher levels of reality, we have to know it from the inside out.

In an epic quotation from the Easter story, Pontius Pilate asks, “What is truth?” It was in response to this statement from Jesus:

To this end was I born, and for this cause came I into the world, that I should bear witness unto the truth. Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice. (John 18:37)

It’s interesting what Jesus says. He doesn’t talk about knowing, teaching or learning truth. He talks about being *of* truth. To me, this means being an expression of truth. This brings us to a higher level of what truth is because it isn’t only what manifests as facts. It isn’t even just the pattern of what is manifest. It is that, but it’s *more* than that. It is the pattern before it is manifest. It is the promise of what *could* manifest—the vision that inspires us. We feel it inside, this possibility of what could manifest and the pattern of it. That’s another level of truth. It’s an invisible truth to be known in consciousness. Our consciousness has the ability to tune in to that truth, be illuminated by it, and then express it and manifest it in form. What a miraculous process!

So often, in the world in which we live, culture blots out a person’s awareness of these higher levels of truth. The facts of the human world are so dizzying, and sometimes terrifying, that a person loses the ability to tune in to anything larger than those facts. We could call this the impact of the manmade world or, to be fair, the human-made world. That world comes to us in so many ways—all the humanly created things, all the humanly created media, all the libraries of

human knowledge. There is nothing inherently wrong with the human-made world, but it can form a bubble around a person that they can’t pierce to see something larger than what’s human-made.

I walked up on the hill behind where I live, on Green Ridge, this morning before our service. It is so easy in that place to get in touch with a world that transcends the human-made reality. On my walk, I reflected on a time when I lived in a world that is full of human-made things: New York City. I lived halfway between uptown and downtown, on Union Square. Out my window, I could see the Twin Towers that were then still standing. It was on the edge of Greenwich Village, and I used to love to walk from there uptown or downtown.

At first, it was crushing to be in the middle of this human-made reality—all the brick and concrete, all the city’s energy vibrating all around me. Many people find it hard to live in New York because they feel like they’re being encased in this human-made world, and they lose touch with a larger reality. I had to penetrate that for myself in being there. Over months, I was able to penetrate all the brick and concrete, the electricity and media, and get in touch with the natural world underlying it all. And it is a beautiful natural world.

I could feel the earth underneath the sidewalk. I could feel the vitality of the rivers. I could look across at the New Jersey Palisades on the other side of the Hudson River and see those majestic cliffs. I had the privilege of sailing up the East

River, under the Brooklyn Bridge, with the wind at my back. I spent time in Central Park, where Frederick Olmsted had the brilliance to design a park that revealed the natural world surrounding the human-made world, with all the rock outcroppings and all the trees. The conglomeration of woodlots, meadows and lakes creates a landing place for migrating birds on the Atlantic Flyway on the East Coast of the United States.

I understood how the place where I worked, Water Street, was named that because it was originally on the bank of the East River. And another place where I worked, called Maiden Lane, was named that because maidens used to walk down to Water Street to fill their buckets with water. And Wall Street wasn't originally a place for stock traders; there was an actual wall there. I learned to feel the sun and the moon, the sky, and the universe beyond. It didn't go away.

And so it is with all of the human-made world. It lives within a far larger context and makes sense when seen from that perspective. And when we know ourselves in that large context, our presence in the human-made world changes. We are not inundated by it. We can see the tragedy that is present, and even the terror of it that visits humankind. We can see the human strife, but we see something else.

It's often said that when you walk in nature, you can feel how pristine it is. And what do we mean when we say that? Do we mean there is no life and death? Of course not. Trees come and go. All animal life comes and goes. When we say nature

is pristine, do we mean there is no rot? Of course not. The pine needles settle on the ground and decompose. All the leaves settle on the ground and rot, providing fertilizer for all that grows—all trees, vegetation, plants and shrubs, which in turn provide food for the animals.

It is all pristine.

In this human world, the pristine sometimes dresses up as human strife. And who of us would trivialize human strife, suffering, pain, or even death? Yet still, when we see with different eyes, beyond our compassion we see something pristine and vital.

Another word for the pristine is *grace*. There is grace in the human experience. Something beautiful is continuing and living. It transcends all the comings and goings. That grace is the truth of what is transpiring for humankind. It's the unfolding pattern of Creation. And it is exquisitely beautiful.

It's easy to have the thought that if we, as human beings, weren't ignorant in so many ways, life would be easier. Do you ever have that thought? We don't make it easy on ourselves, in so many ways. With greater wisdom, greater awareness of truth, we could avoid so much of the human tragedy. And yet we wouldn't avoid truth; we wouldn't avoid grace—the grace of what is unfolding, the pristine nature of it that is happening not only on Green Ridge behind Sunrise Ranch and all over the natural world but what is happening in this human world.

We are called upon to hold a conscious awareness of grace, which is a conscious awareness of truth, realizing that our conscious awareness is not only of our own personal experience. It is a consciousness that is not even limited to the human-made world. It does include a connection to the consciousness of humankind that is beyond the individual dimensions of our thought and feeling. But even human consciousness is not just filled with the human-made world. It includes an awareness of the energy and form of the natural world, beginning with our own bodies and the air that we breathe. It includes the food that we eat. We are in the middle of a pattern of consciousness that is not limited to what we think of as the human self. It is a pattern of consciousness that is designed to be a consciousness of this world, unfolding in grace.

Uranda brilliantly said that truth is about design and control—the unfolding pattern of grace, known in consciousness. Certainly, there is the genetics of all living things. There is also epigenetics—what is present in the conscious field surrounding all living things. There is a truth to be known in that field when our consciousness transcends the merely personal—when our awareness comes out of the mental prison of the human-made world. When we realize that what we are becoming aware of is not only what we think of as self but is far larger and more vast than that, we become aware of the field that we share with all people and with this planet. We are feeling the earth. We are knowing the consciousness of this planet.

In fact, we as humankind are the focus of

consciousness for this planet. We are the heart of this planet. We are the mind of this planet, brought to focus in collective human consciousness. That is what we are knowing. And we are the artist who creates this planet, the unfolding design moving through consciousness, moving Creation, and ending up in form. We see grace, which is this unfolding pattern, and we know grace. And yes, we see the tragedy and the pain, for which we have compassion. That is our connection to it and our participation in what is happening. And yet, we see something larger—the unfolding pattern, the grace of what's occurring in the field we share.

I've come to see that when we use the word *design*, we're speaking about the pattern of things in space. And, of course, that pattern is never static. It's always unfolding, ever-emerging, continually shifting and changing like a kaleidoscope. *Control* is simply a description of that unfoldment over time and how that unfoldment is kept in a creative pattern that leads on to beauty after beauty, revelation after revelation, wonder after wonder. So we are here, not as a human self to master truth but as people called to be masters of its unfoldment in our awareness—masters of keeping that unfoldment in a creative pattern—in *the* creative pattern that's established in a place that's so much more vast than us as a mere human being. And yet, as human beings, we have the opportunity to be available to that larger unfoldment.

Thank you for being on this little thought journey with me, exploring a taxonomy of truth. All aspects of truth are important, and I suspect a

person gets disqualified along the way if they don't pass the test presented by the most basic requirement of being truthful—to be honest. I think it's hard to be dishonest about facts and then know the highest truth available to us. If we can't see the pattern of facts and know the truth at that level, it becomes difficult to tune in to emerging truth. Transcending falsity at every level liberates us to participate in truth.

Here is what this truth journey takes us to, from Shakespeare's *Hamlet*:

*This, above all: to thine own self be true,
And it must follow, as the night the day,
Thou canst not then be false to any man.*

Of course, we could add “woman.” But beyond that, if we are true to ourselves, we cannot only not be false to each other, but we cannot be false to the Creator or to the Creation. And we have the supreme honor of sharing the truth of who we are with another person.

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November 22, 2020*



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